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## EDITORIALS

# 30 YEARS LATER

## JFK's death changed Dallas and the world

Those who are old enough to remember will never forget where they were on Nov. 22, 1963, when they heard the news that the president of the United States was dead. The assassination of John F. Kennedy as his motorcade left downtown Dallas changed this city and the nation.

For many, the assassination destroyed the last remnants of innocence left from simpler times in the 1950s. In its place came new voices to deal with such complex questions as racial equality and U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Universities changed from idyllic foundations of higher learning to angry hotbeds of social protest.

Some Americans felt their chance for civil rights and equal opportunities died with the president.

In the eyes of the world, Dallas changed from a "clean government" community with big ambitions to a "city of hate" that some people believed helped foment the atmosphere that led to President Kennedy's death.

In the wake of the assassination, the so-called business oligarchy that had held tight control on the reins of power in Dallas for more than 30 years

was forced to re-examine the city it had built. While the climate for economic growth in Dallas was unmatched, the city's conservatism and racial division, its tolerance of political extremism, no longer could be glossed over.

The failure of city leaders to condemn right-wing extremists, who spit upon Adlai Stevenson and jostled then Vice President and Mrs. Lyndon Johnson during visits prior to Nov. 22, left Dallas open to widespread criticism.

Despite the peaceful desegregation of schools and public accommodations in 1961, Dallas still was a city of limited opportunities for anyone who wasn't a white male. Sensing economic repercussions, even the black clergy pulled back its desegregation efforts following the assassination.

The city fell into a deep depression that



its strongest supporters could not shake. "What could its people do to repair the damage from this terrible act?" asked one.

The turnaround did not begin until Erik Jonsson, a founder of Texas Instruments, agreed to serve as mayor and brought about the Goals for Dallas program in 1967. Through that plan, which involved citizens from throughout the community, Dallas developed bond issues to help build Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Service Center, the City Hall and the downtown library. People came from other cities to copy the goals program.

The successful rebuilding of Dallas' business image still did not address the city's historic failure to provide equal political and economic opportunities regardless of race or sex. Yet, by building a new skyline, Dallas at least felt the restoration of its energy. But what of its soul? What of the pluralism that was embodied in John F. Kennedy?

It's no secret that Dallas did not rush to embrace that autumn visit by President Kennedy, though civic leaders banded together to afford him the dignity and the reception that the office deserved.

In the aftermath, perhaps the city's leaders focused more on image than in making the substantive changes needed to bring about a more pluralistic society — more on building structures than building a spirit of equality. Dallas frequently linked bricks and mortar with progress. The future demands that we link arms.

Certainly, the nasty exhibitions of political extremism went away. But it took a series of federal court cases to force Dallas to face up to the realities of political inclusion.

At the time of the assassination, African-Americans had no elected officials in Dallas. At present, there are three African-Americans and two Hispanics on the 15-member City Council and three African-Americans and two Hispanics on the nine-member school board. The five-member Dallas County Commissioners Court includes its first African-American member.

Women have become an important part of the political fabric of the community at all levels, including serving as mayor. Dallas indeed is beginning to open up, to celebrate the explosion of diversity that has come in the last 30 years.

But three decades after that fateful day in November, is Dallas truly a different city than the one that was so vulnerable to world scorn? Some of the same needs exist today as in the early 1960s, such as equal access to the workplace.



When Dr. Luther Holcomb, former executive director of the Greater Dallas Community of Churches, met with black clergy in the early 1960s, he found that jobs were the main concern. "Minorities didn't have a chance at a decent job," he was told.

The same concern about jobs is still prevalent. But there are encouraging signs that Dallas is beginning to address that issue more openly and aggressively. Following years of economic decline, Dallas' financial fortunes once again are on the rise.

In contrast to the past, the business leadership has made an unprecedented commitment to make sure the entire city benefits from Dallas' recovery. The Dallas Together Forum has convinced more than 160 major companies to sign a covenant, stating that they will make annual progress reports on minority hiring, promotions and the use of minority contractors.

It's a shrewd strategy: Participating companies will be embarrassed if they do not diversify their work forces. And non-participating companies will be embarrassed if they sit on the sidelines.

If successful, this commitment from the

private sector could prove to be as important to Dallas in the 1990s as the Goals for Dallas plan was in the 1960s.

Some leaders, however, believe Dallas still has a long way to go in learning how to show respect for differences, to solve its problems of "Balkanization." And these problems have little to do with the death of Mr. Kennedy. As Stanley Marcus has said, "We did not listen to Kennedy's goals while he was alive; we don't remember them now."

But we are at least moving in the right direction. With the opening of the Sixth Floor in 1989 — through the cooperation of Dallas County government, Dallas County Historical Commission leaders and the citizens of Dallas — Dallas was able to come to peace with that part of its past and provide this important historical exhibit for future generations.

And the calls are going forward, that all aspects of the community must work together, with forgiveness and respect.

After 30 years, Dallas has moved out from beneath the shadows of the Texas School Book Depository building. The assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy was a tragedy still shared by this city, the nation and the world. No other president has been able to stir emotional fervor or capture the public's imagination as he did during his relatively brief time in the White House.

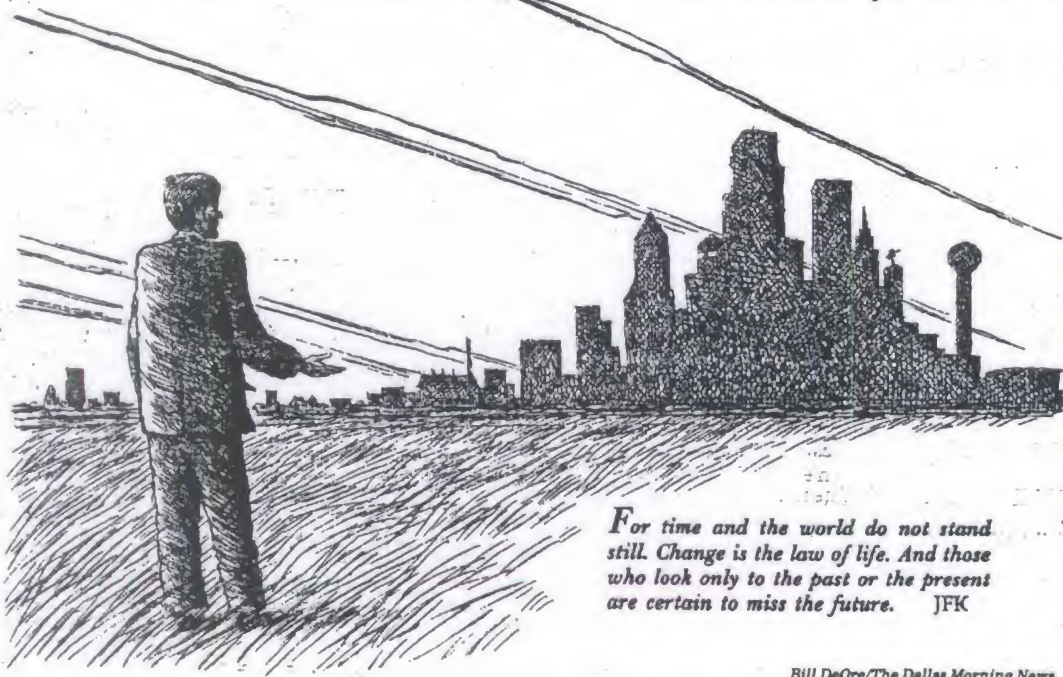
Today, we mourn President Kennedy's loss. We observe, with hope, the growth and maturity of the city that will always be intertwined with his name. And we pray for more.

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**DEORE'S WORLD**

*The Dallas Morning News '93, Universal Press Syndicate 11/12*



*For time and the world do not stand still. Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or the present are certain to miss the future. JFK*

*Bill DeOre/The Dallas Morning News*

# Memories of Nov. 22, 1963



**William McElvaney.** THEN: Pastor of St. Stephen United Methodist Church in Mesquite. NOW: Retired from Perkins

School of Theology

"We had a strong political polarization then. It was not a good climate in terms of the response of the political right toward President Kennedy. What ensued after the assassination was a major reflection on the part of Dallas, which some of us thought was very necessary to have happen.

"When you have something like this happen, you can either say it was just one of those unfortunate things that happens and who could have kept Lee Harvey Oswald from doing it, or you can probe more deeply and look at conditions in the city, look at the lack of response of leadership.

"We still have a strong legacy of racial exclusion from our past. It is loosening, but we have never had to confront it the way other cities did."



**Annette Strauss.** THEN: Prominent Dallas volunteer, was at Nov. 22, 1963. NOW: Former mayor of Dallas.

"I was so saddened that this could happen to the president and that it had taken place in Dallas.

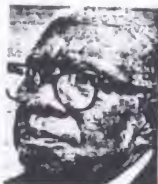
"People remembered the incident in Dallas where Adlai Stevenson was spit upon. And then there was the newspaper ad on the day of the president's visit, challenging him on several issues. I think that led the public to blame President Kennedy's death on the climate in Dallas. That really hurt this city.

"You would never have incidents like those in this city today. We are a much more diverse community."

The recent opening of the Museum of African-American Life and Culture at Fair Park provided an accurate view of where this city is in 1993, she says. "People of all colors were there to celebrate the opening of this wonderful museum. Their strong support was an indication of how far Dallas has come in bringing everyone together."

*Today's editorial was based on interviews by editorial staff members with leaders in Dallas at the time of the assassination. It includes interviews made as part of the Oral History Project of the Dallas County Historical Foundation, which are not yet available to the public.*

**Rev. Ceasar Clark.** THEN AND NOW: Pastor of the Goodstreet Baptist Church in South Dallas and a key player in desegregation efforts.



"Dallas in those days was much segregated and in the throes of many who wanted to preserve the status quo. ... The assassination caused the city to look at itself and to conclude that something needed to be done.

"All citizens have a stake in the well-being of the city. It's up to all citizens to see to the peaceable ongoing of the city. Unless the good folks of all races work together, then the scoundrels will destroy us all. The way for evil to succeed is for good people to do nothing.

"There are three things we (African-Americans) have to do to get where we ought to be: use the ballot. We have to register to vote and go out and do it. We have to become economically respectable. Blacks will never stand tall until they get some money. Freedom without money is a joke. And we have to go to school to get an education."



**David Braden.** THEN: A Dallas architect who would become president of the Citizens Charter Association, the political wing of the Citizens Council. NOW: Retired, serves on the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport Board.

"The assassination of President Kennedy was a real changing point for Dallas. It had a stunning effect on this community. We saw the city's image riddled by what took place here.

"The fact that the assassination happened in Dallas was a fluke. It happened here because Lee Harvey Oswald was here."

Recovery began with Mayor Erik Jonsson, whose Goals for Dallas program "provided an opportunity for everyone to get involved in rebuilding the city."

**Trini Garza.** THEN: Instrumentation engineer at the Ling-Temco-Vought plant in Grand Prairie. NOW: Dallas school board trustee, owner of Ranchero Restaurant and Bakery.



"I had only been in Dallas for two years when we heard the news on the radio that President Kennedy had been

getting ready to break for lunch, and it was a complete shock.

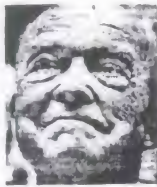
"Later, there were many stories told about Dallas. I remember the one about a group of grade school children that cheered when their teacher told them the president had been shot. I began to wonder what kind of city I was living in.

"But there were so many people like the Cullums and others who worked hard to change the public perception of Dallas. They showed the city's real feeling of regret at what had happened.

"There have been tremendous changes in Dallas since 1963. We are still on a learning cycle, still trying to understand each other. But I feel that Dallas is a place where everyone is working to make things better."



**Erik Jonsson.**  
**THEN:** Head of Texas Instruments and president of the Dallas Citizens Council, business leaders who comprised the city's most influential decision-making body. Host for the Trade Mart luncheon. **NOW:** Retired from TI and former mayor.



"At that time, we had the preachers of a dozen (black and white) churches that met regularly and frequently. We wanted to achieve (desegregation) in a peaceable, reasonable way, without any bloodshed or anything looking like dispute, other than verbal. We accomplished that. There was no disorder. When we had the assassination occur, there were possible reasons why disorder could occur, but it was possible to short-circuit it so that some things would not happen that would have sparked a revolution here. We never had one.

"Gov. (John) Connally did not want the Kennedys to visit Dallas. He was a political liability in Connally's view. After all, he was a Democrat and from the East. Connally was a Texan, and he was still a Democrat, but he was in a country that was changing to Republicanism.

"As Connally put it, 'What do you say to the president of the United States if he says, 'I want to come to Dallas'? Finally, there was no other way but to invite him."

**John Stemmons.** **THEN:** First vice president of the Dallas Citizens Council, developer with Trammell Crow of the Trade Mart, where the Kennedy luncheon was to be



held.

"Quite frankly, we weren't exhilarated by the fact he (Kennedy) was coming. (But) we wanted to make sure we received him with great dignity."

On the day of the assassination, Mr. Stemmons was so distraught that he told his wife, "let's get out of town. I can't stand this." Mr. Stemmons said he needed to "get away and think" about what Dallas could do to repair the damage to the city from this terrible act. "The populace in general had a feeling that Dallas had some responsibility for this. I didn't accept that at all. I felt a sense of personal responsibility because it happened in my town."

**Stanley Marcus.** **THEN:** Retailer, one of the city's progressive leaders, was to have presented Mrs. Kennedy a saddle for her children's pony at the luncheon. **NOW:** Retired chairman of Neiman Marcus.



Mr. Marcus recently wrote, "(Lyndon) Johnson was never popular in Dallas; he was a new breed of politician that the Dallas business leadership didn't care for. Johnson was regarded as a liberal, one who advocated social change, a philosophy for which the conservative leadership of Dallas was not ready.

"We did not listen to Kennedy's goals while he was alive; we don't remember them now. The assassination did not lead, as many had hoped, to the transformation of Dallas to a city of brotherly love. There is little evidence to prove that Dallasites are more or less humane, more or less interested in the welfare of their fellow citizens. They preach democracy to the world but resent democracy in action when some of the elected minority leaders use shrill and abrasive techniques to register their opinions. The courts have been more responsible than the electorate in making the city and institutions practice democratic procedures."

**Rev. S.M. Wright.** **THEN AND NOW:** Pastor of Peoples Baptist Church in South Dallas, longtime head of the Interdenominational Ministers Alliance. He was at the Trade Mart for the luncheon.



"We had problems — police problems, civil rights problems. It was pretty rough. It was no easy cakewalk. We didn't have any elected officials or any thing.

"Black people are going to have to come together. . . . We have to get our business people together. We used to have that in the '50s and '60s.

"We have the people in positions of leadership now. But we still have a long way to go. First thing we are going to have to do is try to forgive one another, love and respect each other. And respect our differences."